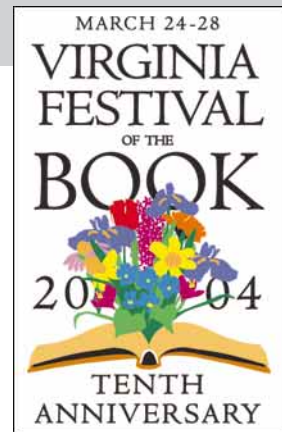


***The Stories of Richard Bausch* by Richard Bausch recommended by Ted Genoways**

A program of the Virginia Center for the Book at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the "VABooks!" column suggests books for Virginians to read in common. This month Ted Genoways—the new editor of *Virginia Quarterly Review* and author of the poetry collection *Bullroarer*—recommends *The Stories of Richard Bausch*. We hope that individuals, book groups, families and neighbors will read and discuss VABooks! selections.



Richard Bausch may be the finest short story writer in English. That's not the sort of thing I say lightly—especially considering the competition: Charles Baxter, Annie Proulx, Richard Ford, Alice Munro, Stuart Dybek, to name just a few of my favorites. Many of the best writers of Bausch's generation, however, have abandoned the short story for the novel. Novels are more lucrative, win more awards, and they reap many more readers. Though Bausch has certainly written his fair share of novels (most notably *The Last Good Time* and last year's *Goodbye to the Cannibals*), it has always been the short story where he shines most brightly. The result, as can be seen in *The Stories of Richard Bausch*, is an unparalleled body of work—and, as a resident of Virginia for more than thirty years, this book belongs in every home in the state.

Story after story brings us into new worlds and introduces us to new unforgettable crises and crossroads. "Aren't You Happy for Me?" is a hilarious and heartbreaking phone conversation—a daughter calling her dad (in Charlottesville) to say that she's marrying her literature professor. In "Tandolfo the Great" a professional clown, luckless in love, vents his anger at a party for a chubby birthday boy. At the opening of "The Man Who Knew Belle Starr," a lonely driver picks up a hitchhiker and the story chronicles the harrowing consequences. "Nobody in Hollywood" begins with the narrator's admission, "I was pummeled as a teenager. For some reason I had the sort of face that asked to be punched."

And the stunningly beautiful story "What Feels Like the World" follows a man and his awkward granddaughter as she prepares for her fifth grade gymnastics demonstration and worries about the probability of public failure.

The stories in this collection are as good as anything written in the last thirty years—richly drawn characters, compelling situations, dead-on dialogue. Bausch has a kind of unbounded compassion for ne'er-do-wells and ordinary Joes, a fascination with how people respond to unexpected obstacles. Most amazingly, put in these improbable situations, Bausch's characters always respond in recognizable ways, making what we never imagined possible into something so right that we feel as if we had been there to witness it first-hand. This requires more than good writing; it takes wisdom, and Bausch has it in spades.

This retrospective is a mammoth collection—at more than 650 pages—but every word is in place, and every story earns its own diamond-hard truth. *Kirkus Reviews* recently hailed this collection as "the book for which Bausch will be remembered." Let's hope so. As far as I'm concerned, this is the most thoroughly satisfying, witty, insightful, and affecting collection of stories to appear since Raymond Carver's best stories were gathered into *Where I'm Calling From* in 1988. With any luck, Richard Bausch's genius will be recognized now as heir and equal to Carver's.

The 2003 Virginia Literary Award winner in fiction and member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers, Richard Bausch will be among the featured readers at the tenth annual Virginia Festival of the Book, March 24-28, 2004 in Charlottesville. For more information, visit vabook.org.

Virginia Festival of the Book

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